

November Joe

A Sherlock Holmes of the Wilderness

By Hesketh Prichard

Author of "DUN O," Etc.



HESKETH PRICHARD

CHAPTER X.

(Continued.)

The Man of the Mountains.

Then Peterham turned to Puttick.

"What do you think of it, Ben? You have some experience of these squatters up here. Do you think they mean business?"

"There ain't much fooling about these mountain men," Puttick answered bitterly. "And now I say this to you, Mr. Peterham, and I can't say it any stronger. If you're minded to stay on here at this place, you must pay."

"You know well enough I don't intend to pay."

"Listen a bit, Mr. Peterham. Here's my notion. You'd best pay if you can't pay. What the warden said."

"What? What? Go on!"

"If you don't want Miss Peterham hurt or killed."

"That's how I read it. What else could he mean? He said you'd be sorry all your life."

"Good Heavens! Even the most hardened ruffians would not hurt a woman. You don't think it possible?"

Peterham turned to me.

"I think that Linda runs a very tight ship."

"Then she shall go."

But when Linda was called and the note made clear to her she absolutely refused to leave a bluff.

"You will force me to pay the money that," said Peterham, "though as well aware that this demand is only the first of many. When these blackguards want a thousand dollars, say, or ten thousand, they know they will only have to ask me to supply them. But I can't pay."

Joe turned to Peterham. "If you don't want to pay, I'll be right sorry to come with you. I don't hold anything against you, but I know Joe, who knows Joe, was surprised to find him offer so definite an opinion on such strong terms, but Linda had her hands."

"All right, I won't pay. Why, if you attempt to hurt me, Joe will make me regret it; wouldn't you?"

Joe flashed him a glance of his glorious eyes.

"I sure try hard enough," replied Peterham. "And now, Mr. Quaritch, ask Ben here to show me where the fellow stood when he held him up."

Joe went down to the brook, and went with him. We were soon in the canoe, which Puttick had been mending.

"Here's where I was, and there's where he stood," said Puttick, pointing to a small mass of rock close by. "There's the place I set down my gun."

November glanced over the details and then followed the bank of the brook for some distance. Presently he returned.

"Did you strike his trail?" asked Puttick.

"No, the stones led right away to a ledge, and like as not he came in canoe."

"Then as not," agreed Puttick, and named his work on the canoe which seemed to put off the matter earlier than the day.

We found Linda in the living-room hanging some fishing-tackle. She once appealed to Joe.

"Joe, I want to try some of those English lures Mr. Quaritch says are so good. I'm going to fish and I want to use the best. Will you lend me a few?"

Joe took the rod and, as he examined it, said:

"If I like you to make me a promise, Linda, I'll lend it to you."

"What is it?"

"To go out at all to-day."

"But Joe, it's such a lovely day. You know you thought all that talk with Ben Puttick was just to get me out of the house."

"You don't think I'm in danger?"

"You're in great danger, Miss Linda."

"From whom?"

"From hard to say."

"I can't stay indoors undernearly any day. I don't believe I would attack a woman, though they did you would catch them."

He handed it back to Linda.

"Look here, Miss Linda, if you'll stay in the house just over to-day I won't wonder but it might be quite safe for you to go out to-morrow—and after that."

"Joe! You mean you have discovered?"

"No! I ain't discovered nothing, but if you stay in the way I ask may be I shall." Joe took up his hat.

"Where are you going, November?" I asked.

"Over to Senile Lake, Mr. Quaritch. Will you see Ben Puttick and tell him I won't be back till late, and will he cook the potatoes and the cornmeal cakes, if I don't get back to time? Miss Linda will you please tell every one, even your father, that you have a mighty painful head and that's why you're staying in?"

"Yes, Joe," said Linda.

CHAPTER XI.

The Man in the Black Hat.

Peterham's departure I took my rod and went down to the brook, where I fished throughout the morning.

The rise, however, was poor, so I returned to the house, and after lunch I took a book and sat with it in the veranda, where I was joined in due course by Linda and Mr. Peterham.

"It's cool here; the only cool spot in the place to-day," remarked Peterham.

"Yes, and don't the spruces smell sweet?" said Linda. "Joe cut them to give me shade."

She pointed to a row of tall saplings propped against the rail of the veranda, so as to form a close screen.

"Joe always thinks of things for people," she added.

Peterham glanced from me to Linda. "If your headache's bad, you had better lie down in the house," he said.

"It is ever so much better, but I'll fetch some smelling salts."

I was about to offer to bring them for her when I caught her father's eye behind her back, and remained where I was. As soon as she had gone in, Peterham stepped up to me and whispered:

"To give her shade?" he repeated. I looked round and nodded.

"There is always shade here," he went on. "The sun can't get in through the pines on this side; the wood is thick here."

"That's true," I agreed, looking at the close-grown junipers that stood in front of us. "Joe stacked these saplings against the rail for some other reason."

"I know," he knew that Linda would very likely sit here, and he was afraid."

"Afraid? Of what?" said Linda suddenly from behind us. "No one could hurt me here. Why, I could call for help and you are both here; you could protect me."

"I've heard of a rifle-bullet," said Peterham. "For my sake, go in, Linda!"

As he said the words from far away came the sound of a shot. Linda started, and then a second shot, and then a third, and then a fourth, and then a fifth, and then a sixth, and then a seventh, and then an eighth, and then a ninth, and then a tenth, and then an eleventh, and then a twelfth, and then a thirteenth, and then a fourteenth, and then a fifteenth, and then a sixteenth, and then a seventeenth, and then an eighteenth, and then a nineteenth, and then a twentieth, and then a twenty-first, and then a twenty-second, and then a twenty-third, and then a twenty-fourth, and then a twenty-fifth, and then a twenty-sixth, and then a twenty-seventh, and then a twenty-eighth, and then a twenty-ninth, and then a thirtieth, and then a thirty-first, and then a thirty-second, and then a thirty-third, and then a thirty-fourth, and then a thirty-fifth, and then a thirty-sixth, and then a thirty-seventh, and then a thirty-eighth, and then a thirty-ninth, and then a fortieth, and then a forty-first, and then a forty-second, and then a forty-third, and then a 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